

Short Story Writing - Ten Beginnings to Avoid

In the same way that editors don't want to see an ending they've seen before, equally, there are some story beginnings that have been done to death. Here are ten you shouldn't use.

It was a dark and stormy night.

The "weather report" gambit. Not only is it a lazy way to start a story, but this one was voted "Worst story opening of all time."

I hadn't seen her in the bar before. She was pale, but interesting.

The "Vampire pick-up gambit" Or maybe they're a werewolf, or alien, or serial killer. Or maybe the narrator isn't what he or she seems. Either way, the story turns out the same, and the editor will have given up long before he got to the end.

The man with the piercing eyes and pointed beard asked 'What you would give to have your heart's desire?'

The old "Pact with the Devil" gambit. Only try this if you really have sold your soul for fame and fortune - all other permutations have been played out years ago.

I thought he was supposed to be in Vegas, so I was surprised to see

Almost as old as pact with the Devil stories is the "I talked to a ghost" gambit. Cavemen probably told this story to each other around their campfires. And you think an editor hasn't heard it?

I woke up in the dark, and all I could feel above me was velvet, and beneath that, wood.

The "buried alive" gambit. Those cavemen probably knew this one as well. A variation is the "Sixth Sense" gambit where the narrator is already dead. Do you think the editor didn't see the film?

They gave me a really good going over, and I vowed there and then to have my revenge.

The "Clint Eastwood" gambit. Generally a sign that you're going to be explicitly violent. Even if the editor wants that kind of stuff, they'll want a better plot than this.

I've always felt strange around the time of the full moon.

The "werewolf" gambit. Even Michael Jackson knows about the effects of the moon on certain people, and you know how cut off he is from reality?

I got a strange feeling when I saw the sarcophagus arrive in the storeroom.

The "mummy" gambit. Even more old-hat since the recent blockbuster movies. Shambling piles of bandages just don't hack it in the 21st Century.

The red-haired FBI agent turned to her partner and said....

Editors watch television too you know. The only place to send these, and those concerning teenage vampire slayers, is to fan-fiction web sites. Even there you have to have an original plotline. Rehashes of episodes just won't make it.

What would you do if I gave you three wishes?

The "Leprechaun" gambit. And guess what - the protagonist gets screwed on the third wish. The editor will be asleep before you get to wish number two.

There's only so many good ideas floating around. Remember, if you've seen something like it before, then the editor will have too. Try to make sure

your idea is an original one. That way you might get an editor to read past page one.

Then you've only got the middle and the ending to worry about, but that's two completely different articles.

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